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ABSTRACT

Many measurement techniques have been developed to assess elements related to attitudes toward reading, which encompass an individual's views, feelings, values, and beliefs. Instruments developed by British teachers include Likert-type scales, a repertory grid technique, and an approach assessing reactions to screened photographs of different reading situations. Attitude assessment techniques may be divided into the following categories: interviews, which are practicable only for small sample work; Likert-type and Thurstone-type scales comprising a series of statements about reading with which pupils are required to indicate degree of agreement or disagreement; sentence completion and open-ended questioning related to attitudes toward reading; semantic differential scales, which require pupils to rate aspects of reading on each of several different scales; repertory grids, on which pupils react to statements about reading experiences; and self-reports, for which students answer a series of questions about reading situations. A model has been developed to allow for a comparison of the attitudes of individuals and groups. (The paper provides suggestions for constructing and scoring attitude measurement scales.) (GW)

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ASSESSING ATTITUDES TO READING

by

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1. INTRODUCTION

Any discussion relating to attitudes requires some statement of definition. The term "attitude" has changed its meaning over the past 100 years from a time when it meant a physical posture to the more modern interpretation in terms of something more personal. Even today there are many different uses of the term ranging across the disciplines of Psychology and Sociology. At one level attitude can refer to the broad pattern of an individual's reactions to his social world, while at a more precise level it may relate to the feelings or views which an individual holds about a single topic or person.

A collection of papers by Warren and Jahoda (1973) covers several of the different aspects of attitudes, not specifically related to reading but ranging over a number of social contexts. The view which I adopt towards attitudes, now with particular reference to reading, includes an individual's views, feelings, values, beliefs; indeed the area generally defined as "affective". This approach is somewhat broader than that adopted by other workers, but it allows me to cover a wider range of attributes of attitude when it comes to assessing them. The approach I have adopted therefore allows me to consider all the components of an individual's beliefs and experiences, his motives and interests, his views and feelings. Attitude is therefore closely related both to an individual's experiences and to his perceived needs. In this sense it is dynamic rather than static, just as it is probably multi-dimensional rather than unitary.

The extent to which attitude combines a cognitive or thinking component with affective or feeling components is adequately described by Elms (1976). His view that the affective components cannot entirely be separated from

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the cognitive components is in accord with my own. This issue is of particular importance in the designing of attitude measures. Although some of the measurement techniques described later may lay claim to only one or other of these areas, there remains an element of uncertainty. For example, we attempt to expose an individual's personal views and expressions but we may never be certain that overt responses are an exact duplication of that individual's "private responses". It is probably only the latter which is truly affective and what we measure is the result of some rationalisation (a cognitive process) of privately held views.

2. PREVIOUS WORK IN THE FIELD

An up-to-date summary of assessment instruments and techniques in reading is given by Pumfrey (1976). It is interesting to note that he quotes only three measures of attitude to reading which have been prepared wholly within the British context. Each of these measures, the Dunham Attitude to Reading Scale, the Georgiades' Attitude to Reading Scale and the Williams' Reading Attitude Scale appears to have been prepared within the context of a higher degree dissertation. Neither the Dunham Scale nor the Williams' Scale has been published and the Georgiades' Scale is reported in the proceedings of the Second International Reading Symposium. None of these measures is therefore widely available as a commercially produced instrument. Each of them also has a limitation of having been prepared for a fairly narrow age range, although it is likely they could be used to test a wider age range, possibly with some modification.

At Middlesex Polytechnic, Merril Brown has produced a Scale for use with pupils at the 2nd year of the Secondary school. It is of the traditional Lickert-type scale which I shall describe later. The limited range of its standardisation, a single year of age range, may be its major limitation.

Roger Beard at Nene College, Northampton is also working in this area, this time using the repertory grid technique. This I shall also describe

later. As far as I am aware, he has not, to date, produced any new measures of attitude to reading.

The work done at Edge Hill College of Education also represents a major contribution to the field of attitudes to reading. There have been a number of notable pieces of work, again carried out as part of a degree or diploma dissertations and which have produced some new measures of attitude to reading. The approach adopted in a study by Jean Bainbridge (1977) uses screened photographs of different reading situations. A screened photograph is one printed through a screen eliminating, say, 50% of the picture, giving a striped or mottled effect and reducing the clarity of the detail. The purpose of this technique is to eliminate distractive elements in the photograph and thus enable a child to make a judgment on an overall situation. Although this approach is not new to assessment, it probably has not been used much in assessing attitudes to reading. As a marketable test of attitudes this method of assessing attitudes is potentially expensive, but it lends itself to further research and application.

The second Edge Hill study I shall mention is one by Ann Middlehurst (1977). One very creditable feature of this work is a very full and comprehensive survey of the literature. The attitude measure produced is also a Likert-type scale and its construction is very well described in the dissertation. The validation of the test appears to use teacher rating of individual pupils with respect to attitude, a method which I have also used.

The remaining work in this field, as far as I am aware, is principally American. There are some published attitude to reading scales available, such as the Estes (1971) Scale, an Attitude Inventory produced by Kennedy and Halinski (1975), and a scale to measure Attitudes towards Teaching Reading in Content Classrooms by Vaughan (1977). Although it is certainly helpful to know about the American attempts, I think we have to devise measures which are specifically relevant to the British pupil or teacher.

3. THE TECHNIQUES OF ATTITUDE ASSESSMENT

There are, no doubt, many different ways of categorising the techniques available for assessing attitudes, and the one which I will suggest is not necessarily the best. The main headings which I consider are worth a separate mention are,

a. interviews
b. Likert-type and Thurstone-type scales
c. sentence completion and open-ended questions
d. semantic differential scales
e. personal constructs within a repertory grid
f. self report.

I shall describe what each different approach entails and give some examples of the questions or statements involved.

a. interviews

The use of interviews to assess attitudes to reading offers certain attractions in that a more searching approach may be adopted than is often possible through a pencil and paper test. It is also easier to hold an individual's attention in a face to face situation.

Some would go as far as to suggest that personal feelings and attitudes are more likely to be demonstrated when a person is subjected to direct questioning in the interview situation than when responding, perhaps anonymously, to questionnaire. This would be true for some individuals, but probably not all. There will be certain interviewees who would feel less well at ease "in the firing line" during an interview and who would therefore feel more secure in completing a more "remote" instrument. There is also less likelihood of "projection" in an interview than in a pencil and paper test.

For comparative purposes an interview would require to be structured at least to the extent of ensuring that the same questions were asked of all the candidates. Despite this type of structuring, however, the

analysis of responses from interviews will probably require post-hoc coding and scoring, a task which is laborious and time-consuming.

For large sample work, interviewing is either impracticable or very expensive, and it is likely to be restricted to small sample work. It may be particularly useful in attempting to assess the attitudes of teachers where there is often an antipathy towards completing yet another questionnaire.

b. Likert-type and Thurstone-type Scales

This technique is probably that most widely used in assessing attitudes in general. It appears with greatest frequency in the instruments which I mentioned earlier for measuring attitudes to reading.

The Likert-type scale is the easier of the two to construct and comprises a series of statements about reading, with which the pupil is required to indicate his agreement or disagreement. Such statements might include,

	Definitely agree	Probably agree	Not sure	Probably disagree	Definitely disagree
a. The more pictures a book has the better it is.					
b. There is too much reading in school.					
c. I like reading aloud to my teacher.					

Of the 20 to 30 such items in a Likert-type scale there should be a balance of positive and negative statements, i.e. statements a. and c. above would be considered positive while b. would be negative. A random distribution of the positive and negative items within the scale would also be required. There are some variations in the headings given to the choice categories, so instead of "definitely agree" we could use "strongly

agree" and instead of "probably agree" we could use "agree", with similar variations for the disagree terms.

The scoring of Likert-type scales, to allow comparison of one person's responses with those of another involves assigning a value of 5 to "definitely agree" responses of positive items reducing through 4, 3, and 2 to a value of 1 to "definitely disagree" responses of positive items. The converse scoring of 1 through to 5 would be applied to similarly rated negative items. In this way a total "attitude score" may be attained for a single respondent, that score theoretically ranging (for a scale of 20 items) from 100 (20 x 5 points, i.e. definitely agreeing with all the positive items and definitely disagreeing with all the negative items) to 20 (20 x 1 point, i.e. definitely disagreeing with all the positive items and definitely agreeing with all the negative items). There is an alternative form of scoring of assigning values +2, +1, 0, -1, -2 instead of 5, 4, 3, 2, 1, with equivalent results being obtained between scores of +40 and -40 (for a scale of 20 items).

A successful Likert-type scale will contain items which will discriminate between different views held by children or for whom the scale is designed. Thus an item on the scale for which all respondents give the same rating (definitely disagree, probably disagree .... etc.) is not a useful one in that it will not discriminate one person from another. In my own work with Likert-type scales, I have found that Primary school children aged about 8 years tend to respond in the same way i.e. with little discrimination between them, but with Primary school children aged 11 years there is a wide range of attitude scores. This may be an indication that younger children either do not hold, as a group, as widely varying attitudes as older children, or it may be a reflection of the "attraction" to giving "good" or "expected" answers.

The Thurstone-type scale is a little more complicated in its design in that it presents to the individual a list of statements relating to, in

this case, reading. The list might include,

a. Reading is boring

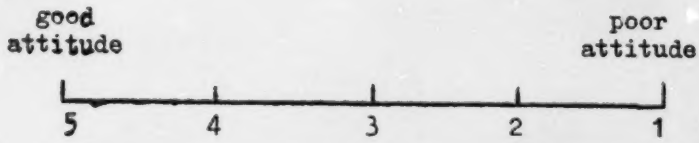
b. It is important to be able to read

c. Books are exciting

d. Most things are more fun than reading

e. Reading homework is unnecessary.

The list may contain 20 to 30 such items and the respondent is required to select a specified number (say 6) with which he personally agrees most. Each of the items in the scale must have been previously judged, by an independent sample of informed persons, to reflect a position along a scale ranging from good attitude to poor attitude to reading, thus



Each item will have been judged along this scale by a number of people and will therefore have its own "attitude value", being the average of all the judgments made. The items presented in the Thurstone-type scale must reflect the whole range of attitudes from "good" to "poor" and in equal proportions. In order to achieve this, many items are judged and discarded either because the judges cannot agree or because it reflects neither a good nor a poor attitude. Thus the procedure of producing such a scale is lenghty and laborious.

Once completed, however, a Thurstone-type scale can very easily and quickly be used to measure an individual's attitude. Each statement on the scale has a value (say between 5 and 1) and thus the total value of the 6 items chosen by any one person can be taken as a reflection of that person's attitude to reading.

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For example:

Child A chooses statements

1, 2, 7, 13, 19, 20

which have judged values of

3.4 4.2 3.8 3.3 4.1 4.6

giving a total value of 23.4

Child B chooses statements

5, 8, 13, 16, 17, 18

which have judged values of

2,8 2.1 3.3 2.9 1.2 3.0

giving a total value of 15.3

Assume that a value of 5 was the maximum value (i.e. good attitude) and a value of 1 was the minimum value (i.e. poor attitude), then child A has a markedly better attitude to reading than does child B. The use of Thurstone-type scales in measuring attitude to reading appears to be more limited than the use of Likert-type scales, probably because it is easier to produce the latter and much more time-consuming to produce the former.

c. sentence completion and open-ended questioning.

With sentence completion measures of attitude to reading, the pupils are provided with unfinished sentences such as,

The best thing about reading is ....

When it's my turn to read aloud I feel ...

I need to be able to read because ...

The task of completing sentences such as these is not usually a difficult one, but it does produce a wide range of answers. Most children quite enjoy this type of exercise, perhaps because it is easy or perhaps because it is enjoyable to "think up" answers. From my own work with this type of assessment I have found that it has limited value in assessing attitudes

although it can provide illuminative evidence to support the findings of other measures. There is also the difficulty of post-hoc coding of the responses.

In the open-ended questioning approach, questions are put which allow a wide range of possible responses, such as,

> How would you rate the different reading situations which occur for pupils in your classroom?

This approach to assessing attitudes to reading is similar to the structured interview approach in that the same kind of questions can be asked, and frequently followed by "why?" The obvious difference of course is that the respondent answers questions by writing on a paper and not in the presence of the tester. Responses are likely to be more restricted in length in the written form, also some of the disadvantages of the formal interview will be avoided - such as feeling uneasy in an interview, or being inhibited by a face to face situation.

It is also possible to adopt a more projective approach with an open-ended questionnaire than with an interview. For example, asking pupils to describe what they think a good reader might do and feel like or what they think a poor reader might do and feel like.

d. Semantic differential scales

The application of semantic differential scales to measuring attitudes to reading is fairly new and although some work probably has been done in this country, there are very few references in the literature.

The approach was initially proposed by Osgood et al (1957) and essentially requires the pupil to rate a statement on several factors. Osgood suggests three major factors, an evaluation factor (where the rating represents something good or bad), an activity factor (where the statement is rated as active or passive) and a potency factor (where the rating is on the basis of strong or weak). There are usually 3 or 4 examples of each of these factors in any one semantic differential scale, such as,

READING FOR PLEASURE

nice	———————————	awful	(E)
large	———————————	small	(P)
fast	———————————	slow	(A)
bad	———————————	good	(E)
light	———————————	heavy	(P)
blunt	———————————	sharp	(A)
dirty	———————————	clean	(E)
strong	———————————	weak	(P)
busy	———————————	still	(A)

The pupils are asked to rate "reading for pleasure" on each of the nine scales by placing a cross somewhere along the scale line. It is also easier if the rating is carried out rapidly and the pupils are asked not to stop and ponder over any single scale.

According to Osgood the judgments given by an individual on these 9 scales is more informative than a judgment on a single scale. The individual's ratings on the 9 scales taken together present a more complete picture of his attitudes than does a single scale. A further advantage of the 9 measures, which as you can see bear only a little relationship to the concept being rated, is that the same set of measures can be used to assess a wide range of concepts. So the 9 scales quoted above can allow a direct comparison of a pupil's views about concepts such as,

reading aloud in class

reading text-books for mathematics

comics

etc.

I have used semantic differential scales with children at Secondary school and with their teachers. Whereas the results from the assessment of the pupils was at least satisfactory, it was very much less so with

their teachers. It is fairly clear that the semantic differential scale has a very low "face validity", i.e. it does not appear, on the face of it, to be assessing attitudes to reading. To a group of people as discerning and critical as secondary school teachers this lack of face validity produced in the replies, a large percentage of spurious or unnaturally consistent patterns of response.

This difficulty may restrict the use of semantic differential scales to school-children. Paradoxically other investigations (apart from attitudes to reading) indicate that the semantic differential approach has a higher reliability with increasing age. In any case, further research and experimentation with the technique is certainly required.

e. Personal constructs in repertory grids

The technique centred on the use of a repertory grid has been developed by Kelly (1955) as part of his theory of personal constructs. The essential feature of this approach is that it attempts to examine the way in which an individual interprets his own world. This is achieved by first identifying several elements in the person's real world, for example, in reading these might include a variety of statements about reading or even pictures or illustrations relating to different reading situations, such as

looking up a number in the telephone directory

reading newspapers

reading advertisements or notices.

A sample of children is then asked to consider any three such statements or illustrations and indicate two which are alike in some way, with the third one different. The way in which a child sees two situations as being alike is called a construct. In the three samples given above it might be that two would be perceived as the same and the third different because :

it is good fun

it takes too long

you can please yourself

it is valuable.

Having derived a list of constructs in this way, the application of the repertory grid approach is to ask pupils to "check off" whether or not a variety of reading experiences can be regarded in terms of the construct. In the sample grid below, pupils are required to indicate for each reading situation, which of the constructs apply. Clearly replies will be highly individual and comparison between pupils is not straightforward.

	reading to the teacher	choosing a book from the library	reading for project work	being read to by mother
it is good fun				
it takes too long				
it is valuable				
you can please yourself				

The use of this method for assessing attitudes to reading is still under investigation. One major disadvantage of the method is the lengthy route required to arrive at the grid before it can be applied. It may also be less suitable for comparing individual attitudes, although this is certainly one of its uses. Further research in this area may produce modifications of the technique to allow for a wider applicability.

f. self reports

As a technique, self reprting is probably the most straightforward. It bears a similarity to the open-ended questioning, although in practice has to be more structured. My approach to self reporting has been to ask pupils and teachers a series of questions relating to a list of reading situations. The questions include:

How much do you like this?

How important do you think this is?

How much time do you think should be spent on this?

Each of these questions is asked about reading situations such as,

reading to follow instructions

reading aloud in class

reading to find answers to questions.

Applied in this way, there is a strong similarity to the repertory grid, but without any of the procedures for eliciting the constructs.

Self report techniques used in this way are applicable equally well to both pupils and teachers and with carefully chosen questions, it is possible to administer exactly the same form to both types of person. In fact there is no reason why the same format cannot be extended to include parents along with pupils and teachers.

4. MEASURING INDIVIDUAL ATTITUDES AND GROUP ATTITUDES

Having examined the various methods of assessing attitudes to reading it would appear logical that instruments for use with individuals should follow. There are some of the techniques described above which have already been applied to assessing attitudes to reading, notably the Likert-type scale, and there are others which are undergoing current investigation, such as the semantic differential scale. Probably each of the techniques described above, could, with some modification, be able to produce assessment instruments for use with children of Primary school age, children of Secondary school age, teachers at both Primary and Secondary school levels, and parents. There need be little restriction on the type of respondent for whom an assessment measure can be devised with the exception of a lower age limit of about 8 years. This limit will probably operate with all the types of measure suggested above, because of the tendency of children below that age level to be less well able to indicate their views and attitudes and because younger children find it very difficult not to give the placatory or expected "best" response.

Besides producing instruments for measuring individual attitudes to reading, there may be some value in examining the views of groups of people. Although this could most probably be done in a number of ways, I would like to suggest that a common ground for comparing groups could be the reading situations indicated in the previous section.

The basic model might be something like this.

	reading situations			
parameters of attitudes	reading for pleasure	reading to gain specified information	reading to follow instructions	etc.
how much it is liked				
how much time should be spent on it				
how important it is				

etc.

Using a fairly simple categorisation for the answers given under "parameters of attitudes" such as 5 for "best" response (very much liked, very important etc.) through to 1 for the "worst" response (very much disliked, very unimportant, etc.) a simple matrix could be recorded for a wide range of individuals and groups (by taking average scores). Thus comparisons might be made as follows:

a) an individual pupil
his class teacher (if at Primary school)
his father (or mother)

b) the group attitude of a Secondary school class
the individual opinions of each of the subject teachers taking the class

c) the group views of English teachers at Secondary school
the group views of Science teachers at the same school
the group views of any other specialist group of teachers.

d) the group views of Nursery class teachers
the group views of Primary school Headteachers
the group views of class teachers at the upper end of the Primary school.

In fact the model allows for a comparison of any individual against any other or any group against another. It is important that this approach to assessing attitudes to reading should not be lost in the quest for preparing new and appropriate measurement instruments.

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